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government was considering economic sanctions against Burma. Rangoon hopes to improve its image by emphasizing such issues as the environment and the fight against AIDS. Ironically, the focus on the environment comes at the same time that the Burmese government, looking to boost trade, has stepped-up logging operations near the Thai border.

EAST TIMOR & INDONESIA

Political Scene

Elections will be held in Indonesia in 1992. According to *Inside Indonesia*, the preparations for elections are revealing a pattern which points to the "increasing isolation of Suharto and attempts by him to shore up his position" for the coming polls. This was demonstrated at recent events.

An army seminar took place in Bandung in December last year at which top army officers and intellectuals were to identify priorities for the next 25 years. The recurring theme at the seminar was summed up by Armed Forces Chief of Staff General Edi Sudrajat when he said that the "repressive approach" which characterized the management of political life in the period from 1966 to 1990 was "no longer relevant in the present circumstances". According to him, the priority now should be to give real meaning to the concepts of "popular sovereignty" and participation in political life. His comments put to question Suharto's policy that ordinary Indonesians should be a "floating mass", taking no part in any sort of politics except at election time. Apparently, the Army's strategy of appealing to the need for openness served to undermine Suharto's position and improve the military's image with civilian politicians and intellectuals especially as the 1992 elections approach. It is also indicative of the increasing pressure for the democratization of Indonesian society which the authorities cannot ignore. However, the Army's strategy poses a problem as the military has been the main agent for managing political and social oppression in Indonesia.

More recently 40 retired military officers broke tradition by announcing their decision to join a small political faction, the Indonesian Democratic Party. Members of the armed forces and their family are expected to support the ruling Golkar party.

On the other hand, controversy attended the emergence of a new group, the Indonesian Association of Muslim Intellectuals (ICMI) in December last year. Both Suharto and his vice-president were present at the symposium at which ICMI was formed. Minister of Research and Technology, B.J. Habibie who is rumoured to be a potential Vice-Presidential candidate, became head of the group. According to critics, Suharto's need for the support of the Islamic masses is more crucial at this time when the complete loyalty of the military in the coming election appears doubtful. Under the control of Habibie, ICMI will provide Suharto with an Islamic organization that will be expected to sponsor his continued leadership.

Meanwhile, there appears to be a resurgence of political activity among Indonesian masses. The number of demonstrations and protest rallies are increasing. In Majalengka, peasant families occupied land confiscated from them by a company owned by a daughter of Suharto. In Cilacap, workers and peasants, insisting to see the local official, maintained their rally despite military threats. Peasants groups and their student supporters in particular have maintained their militancy despite brutal repression by the military. A new, independent trade union was recently formed.

Military Campaigns in Aceh

For the past 18 months the Indonesian army has been trying to suppress renewed unrest and protests in Aceh on the northern tip of Sumatra. The military campaign intensified at the end of 1990 with the deployment of commando units to the area under the command of Suharto's son-in-law, Col. Prabowo. The commander, said to be known for his extreme brutality, was reported to have called upon the local population to collaborate with the military, saying: "If you meet GPK (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka*, the Free Aceh Movement) members, you should kill them, no need to investigate... just shoot them or knife them." At least 2,000 Acehnese have been reportedly killed by the Indonesian forces.Reports said that mutilated bodies were often left on roadsides to instill fear among the population and deter them from lending support to Aceh Merdeka. Hundreds of suspected Aceh Merdeka members or supporters have been rounded up, detained without charges and tortured. In May, more than a hundred refuge-seeking Acehnese arrived by boat in Malaysia. Indonesia claimed the Acehnese were economic refugees seeking jobs in Malaysia's labour-starved plantations. Indonesian authorities insisted that the unrest in Aceh was "purely criminal". Malaysia, unwilling to tarnish its relations with Indonesia and to open its doors to more refugees, is set to return the Acehnese.

On 16 March 1991, four Acehnese went on trial in Banda Aceh for activities allegedly aimed at separating themselves from the Indonesian government and changing the state ideology, *Pancasila*." Those tried were Teuku Muhamman Said, a member of the regional assembly (DPRD), Hasbi Abdullah, a university professor, Mulkan Usman and Ridwan Ibas. Four more went on trial a week later, including journalist Adnan Beuransyah who was alleged to have planned to abduct soldiers in order to obtain weapons and release friends from prison and Muslim preacher Tengku Effendi who was accused of recruiting followers to help set up an Islamic state. They were among the twenty-four suspected Aceh Merdeka supporters, many of them academics and civil servants, who have recently been charged with subversion.

Tabloid Editor Convicted of Blasphemy

The editor of the tabloid-magazine, *Monitor*, was convicted of blasphemy and given the maximum sentence, five years in prison on 8 April 1991. Arswendo was prosecuted after *Monitor* published in October 1990 the poll results of people its readers most admired showing that the Prophet Muhammad came 11th on the list. Many Muslims found it offensive. *Monitor's* licence was revoked shortly after the incident. Information Minister Harmoko, part owner of *Monitor*, said the news item could cause religious conflict. Senior journalists consider the verdict a further blow to press freedom in Indonesia

Calendar Scandal

Two people have been arrested and nine others questioned by the military for having distributed a calendar that caricatured government officials. The poster-calendar entitled "Land for the People" aimed to raise awareness concerning the land problem and repression of Indonesian farmers. Bunthoni and Mathius, chair and member of Geni Foundation in Salatiga, Central Java will be facing trial on charges of insulting public officials and spreading hatred of the Indonesian government. Geni is a social action organization composed of students and lecturers at Satya Wacana Christian University . Most of the nine persons who were investigated were Satya Wacana students. The case illustrates the continuing restriction not only of the freedom of expression but also of academic freedom in Indonesia. The fact that the target of the investigation was not the nine NGOs that produced the calendar but Geni Foundation and students of Satya Wacana makes it appear that the Indonesian security forces were using the case to warn activist students and lecturers at the university. Satya Wacana is said to be the center of student protests against the treatment of farmers affected by the Kedung Ombo dam.

Ex-PKIs Denied Right to Vote

Early this year, the military conducted an intensive investigation of 400,000 alleged former members of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) in East Java that resulted in disenfranchising 9,000 East Javanese from the right to vote in 1992. Similar "screening" has also taken place in Central Java involving 300,000; another 9,000 people will also be denied the right to vote. A total of at least 1.4 million Indonesians, usually referred to as "ex-PKI" were screened during the second half of 1990 in preparation for the 1992 elections. In the 1987 election, more than 40,000 were denied their voting rights as a result of the same screening process which the military conducts every time an election is held. Most of the disenfranchised people have, in fact, never been charged and tried in court for their alleged PKI involvement.

Independent Trade Union Formed

A new, independent trade union, *Serikat Buruh Merdeka Setia Kawan* (Solidarity Free Trade Union) was inaugurated on 16 December 1990 in Jakarta. The emergence of the Setia Kawan came at a time of rising unrest across many industries in Indonesia. The number of strikes rose by 200% in 1990, mostly concerning wages which are low even by Southeast Asian standards. The lack of independence of the officially sanctioned *All Indonesia Workers Union* (SPSI) from business and government was said to have impelled the workers to form *Setia Kawan*. SPSI was formed in 1967 by retired army officers and has government ministers, including the Minister for Labour, and employers in its governing board. It has often been accused of siding with employers and unable to protect workers' rights. In 1987, the International Labour Organization called upon the Indonesian government to release its control over SPSI. Government officials and SPSI itself rejected *Setia Kawan*. Suharto declared the new union unnecessary and a potential threat to stability. The Ministry of Internal Affairs has refused to give it a legal status. According to the chair of *Setia Kawan*, Poncke Princen, the legitimacy of the new union does not lie in the *"recognition of the government but on the recognition by the workers. Recognition by the government is just a formality, but recognition by the workers will be the legitimate basis for our existence. Our main aim is not to win acceptance by and be registered at the Department of Labour; it is to register ourselves in the hearts of the workers. Our organization is theirs and it is with them that we want to register ourselves."* On 1 March 1991, at least 14 members of *Setia Kawan* were detained by security forces following its first public demonstration. Union leaders believe the incident marks the beginning of the military campaign to intimidate them.

Update on Kedung Ombo Dam Case

The controversial Kedung Ombo dam was inaugurated on 18 May 1991 with President Suharto telling remaining Kedung Ombo residents that the country's development required sacrifice from the people. About 600 of the 5,200 families have so far refused to leave the dam site. As one Kedung Pring farmer said, they refuse to move because *"the government has never come to talk with us and we're not leaving until they do... We are rice farmers and we want to stay rice farmers. We don't want to live in the forest."* They also complained that the compensation offered to them by the government is far below market levels. They said that the military troops deployed at the site are used to intimidate them.

Indonesian Military Offensives in East Timor

New military offensives were conducted by Indonesian forces in East Timor in 1990 and earlier this year. The large number of troops were ostensibly deployed by Jakarta to capture guerilla leader Xanana Gusmao who embarrassed Indonesian military officials by granting an interview to a foreign journalist in September 1990. An unverified number of civilians were reported to have died as result of the fighting. Reports from Dili said that the operation inflicted heavy casualties on the underground resistance movement. In May 1991, Indonesia's Coordinating Minister for Politics and Security, Sudomo, said that his government will stop pursuing Fretilin guerillas operating in East Timor since they no longer pose any threat.

Concerns have been expressed about the increasing "Timorising" of Indonesia's war against the East Timorese resistance movement. During the recent military offensive, a battalion of East Timorese recruited by the Indonesian army had their first experience of battle fighting fellow East Timorese. Many more young East Timorese are reportedly trained in military camps in Java.

While military campaigns in the rural areas subsided in February 1991, operations of Indonesian forces in urban areas continued unabated. The target of the operations is the growing network of young Timorese activists. A large number of young people have been arrested and detained. There was a wave of arrests, mostly of youths, following a large pro-independence demonstration on 4 September 1990. In October 1990, Indonesian security forces raided a number of schools in Dili where students allegedly expressed support for independence. Many of those detained were reportedly tortured. A number of the students sought refuge at parish churches.

A report in the Australian press said that on November 19, 1990, Indonesian troops entered church grounds in Motael, Dili and arrested and beat about 15 students who had taken refuge there. The same source said that ten other students who sought refuge in a church in Liquica, west of Dili were also beaten and detained by Indonesian forces. Included in this issue of Currents is an account by a victim of torture, said to be the first signed detailed report of torture to come out of East Timor. When news about the military repression of East Timorese youths caused great international concern, the Indonesian security forces were later said to be more careful in their dealing with student protestors.

Death of Mgr. Da Costa Lopes

Dom Martinho da Costa Lopes, former Apostolic Administrator of Dili, died 27 February 1991 in Lisbon. He had been ill for some time. Dom Martinho was a fearless and committed defender of the rights of his people. He strongly denounced what he called the "genocide" of the East Timorese people by Indonesian occupying forces. He actively sought the intervention of the United Nations, the Church and other international organizations on behalf of East Timor. Indonesian authorities accused him of inciting nationalist sentiment and in 1983, the Vatican replaced him with Mgr. Carlos X. Belo.

International Meetings Raise East Timor Issue

Portuguese and Angolan parliamentarians forwarded a motion at the conference of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in Uruguay on 24 October 1990 for recognition of East Timor as a "non-self-governing-territory". The motion was defeated after strong lobby efforts by Indonesian delegates who obtained the support of the Canadian delegation.

The European Community presented a strongly-worded statement to the UN Commission on Human Rights on 27 February 1991 accusing Indonesia of Human rights violation in East Timor including torture and wide-spread killing. A similar statement was also made last year by the Italian ambassador (Italy was then president of the EC) who spoke on behalf of the EC at the UN General Assembly. Indonesia who joined the UNCHR last January reacted strongly saying that the statement was Portuguese-inspired and criticized the EC for letting the statement pass without analysis.

In a 25 March 1991 meeting with a delegation of Parliamentarians for East Timor (PET), UN Secretary General Perez de Cuellar stated that all the UN resolutions which had been passed on East Timor remain in force. He cited the cases of Namibia and Western Sahara (but not Kuwait) as parallels to that of East Timor who, de Cuellar said, is entitled to exercise its right to self-determination.

MALAYSIA

ISA Detentions in Sabah

Maximus Ongkili, a close aide to Datuk Seri Joseph Pairin Kitingan, Chief Minister of the East Malaysian state of Sabah was unconditionally released on 2 March 1991, after 59 days in police custody under the Internal Security Act (ISA). Ongkili, the deputy chief executive of the Institute for Development Studies, a Sabah think-tank, was detained on 3 January 1991 on suspicion of committing actions prejudicial to national security. Two days after Ongkili was picked up, Kitingan was arrested and charged on three counts of corruption. He was released on bail set at M$1.5 million (US$ 550,000), pending the outcome of his case.

The detention of Sabah Foundation executive director Datuk Jeffrey Kitingan, brother of Joseph Pairin Kitingan, under the ISA on 13 May 1991 was the first arrest which